

Halsall St Cuthbert's Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

New Street, Halsall, Ormskirk, Lancashire, L39 8RR

Inspection dates 10–11 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- This thriving and popular school is the very heartbeat of the village and is highly successful in meeting pupils' learning needs. Pupils grow and flourish in a very caring and nurturing environment. Their relationships with adults are extremely positive and built on mutual respect, helping them to 'aim high and think big'.
- The headteacher, very ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has inspired staff, governors and the community to share a 'no excuse' culture and an unrelenting drive to continually improve. As a result, all aspects of the school's work have continued to improve since the previous inspection.
- Pupils' achievement, including that of the most able, is outstanding throughout school. This is reflected in the standards they reach by the end of Year 6, which are usually significantly above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Staff morale is high because they feel appreciated and extremely well supported.
- Senior and middle leaders are highly effective in supporting the focus on continually improving the quality of teaching and achievement of pupils. However, not all teachers are consistently providing high quality marking that helps pupils to improve their work.
- The very strong links with the local community and outside agencies help the school to be highly successful in meeting the needs of pupils and their families, as well as those of staff.
- Pupils' well-being and learning are strongly supported by parental and community involvement.
- Governors are highly passionate and successful in leaving no stone unturned in continually improving all aspects of the school.
- Pupils are rightly proud of their school. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. Their attendance is above average.
- They enjoy an excellent range of homework and activities and clubs to promote their interest in sport, music and the arts.
- Pupils feel safe because of the high quality support and guidance they receive, especially on e-safety.
- Teaching is never less than good and frequently outstanding. Teaching is inspiring, stimulating and challenging to all groups of pupils.
- Children thrive in the early years, make excellent progress from their different starting points and are very well prepared for Year 1.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed the learning of pupils in all classes across school and listened to some pupils read.
- The inspectors checked closely on the work of pupils in lessons, in books and on display around school. They also spoke to pupils both formally and informally about their views of school.
- Inspectors checked carefully on a range of school documentation, including the school's own view of its performance, plans for improvement, the progress of pupils and records of behaviour.
- Discussions were held with a range of senior school leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher and middle leaders. Inspectors also met with governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, checked on their work and scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through checking the results from the school's own surveys of parental opinion and the 102 responses to Parent View, the online survey. Inspectors also spoke with some parents.
- The inspectors took account of the views of staff expressed in the 14 responses to the voluntary questionnaire.

Inspection team

Chris Maloney, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sheila Mawer

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A very small proportion of pupils is from other minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs is low compared to the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is low compared to the national average. This additional government funding is provided for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school has a full-time Reception class.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectation for pupils' achievement in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school has a number of awards, including Arts mark Gold, Active Mark Gold, Silver Sainsbury's School Games Mark and the Healthy School Award.
- The school works in close partnership with the West Lancashire Schools Sports Partnership.
- The headteacher is a national leader of education (NLE) and is used by the local authority to support other headteachers in the local authority.
- An after-school club operates on the school site and is managed by a voluntary committee. It is subject to a separate inspection at a different time and the report can be found on the Ofsted website.
- The school is a National Support School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the excellent practice seen in the marking of some pupils' work is consistent throughout school, so that pupils know precisely how to improve their work and are given the opportunity to respond to the advice provided.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The exceptional leadership of the headteacher has inspired the whole school community to share the vision of a continuously improving school, where pupils grow in an atmosphere of care and understanding. The excellent contribution of the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders ensures that the school is true to this vision.
- Morale in school is exceptionally high because all staff feel valued, appreciated and very well supported. As one staff member wrote on the voluntary staff questionnaire, 'It is a privilege and a pleasure to work at Halsall. There is a very strong team approach where everyone supports each other to the benefit of all children.'
- Senior leaders make regular and rigorous checks on how well each pupil is learning and the progress they are making. This reflects the school's exceptionally strong commitment to ensuring that all pupils have equal opportunities to learn and succeed. Swift action is taken to provide any additional support needed to prevent any pupil from underachieving. The school spends the funds that it receives in respect of disadvantaged pupils wisely, so that their progress is outstanding.
- Senior leaders give teachers clear guidance on how to reflect on and improve their practice. They regularly share practice in school, observe practice in other schools and access the local and national training they require to strengthen their knowledge and the effectiveness of their work in meeting the learning needs of all pupils.
- Middle leaders share the vision of senior leaders. They are confident in their roles and have an excellent understanding of how they are improving the quality of teaching and achievement of pupils in their particular areas of responsibilities.
- Subjects are linked together very creatively and skilfully, such as investigating forces through an 'Eggsperiment' or themes like 'A Taste of India'. Pupils enjoy the many sport activities such as bench ball and diving, and enjoy learning Spanish or to play the guitar.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Themes such as African Week celebrate different cultural traditions. Pupils have many opportunities to help others and raise funds for charity, such as the NSPCC, Red Nose Day, Philippines Disaster and War Child. In addition, the school also promotes and celebrates British values through work on tolerance, freedom of expression and the rule of law that prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Exceptional use has been made of additional funding for physical education and sport to increase participation in competitive sports such as athletics and cross country and to have access to specialist sports coaches. This has resulted in increased fitness levels and participation in clubs and teams in and out of school.
- Although there were some negative responses on Parent View, the school's own recent survey and discussions with many parents during the inspection found no evidence to explain this. Inspectors found strong evidence to show that, overall, parents make an excellent contribution to school life and their children's learning. The exceptionally strong Parent, Teacher and Friends Association provides wonderful opportunities for involvement in school life. A typical parent comment to inspectors was, 'It's a great school, and I have no concerns.'
- The school has very strong and successful links with the West Lancashire Sports Partnership, providing specialist sports coaching, training for staff and access to a wide range of competitive sports.
- The local authority has provided high quality support in checking on the accuracy of school judgements on the quality of teaching and learning, and staff training.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know the school exceptionally well and provide rigorous challenge and support to school leaders and leave nothing to chance in making the school the best it can be. They are well led by the chair of governors and share a passion for meeting the needs of every pupil. They have an excellent range of experience, expertise and skills and are well trained. Governors visit regularly and are linked closely to teachers and subjects. They make sure they have all the information they need to check that all pupils are achieving as well as they should, especially in comparison with schools locally and nationally. They ensure that teachers' pay rewards are closely linked to the pupils making at least good progress and better performance by staff is rewarded. Governors make careful checks to ensure that practice reflects policy in order to ensure that safeguarding meets requirements.
 - Very careful checks are made on the use of all finances, particularly of additional funding for sport and for physical education and sport and for those eligible for the pupil premium to ensure that they are progressing as well as others in school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Their love of school and eagerness to learn and succeed is reflected in their excellent punctuality and above-average and improving attendance. School leaders have worked hard to reduce the number of holidays taken during term time and this has proved successful. They have wonderfully positive relationships with staff who care a great deal about them as individuals. A typical pupil comment was, 'Teachers know us really well and help us to improve.'
- Pupils are extremely polite and welcoming to visitors, taking many opportunities to tell inspectors about their pride in their school. During this inspection, for example, a group of pupils eagerly told an inspector about representing their school at chess and winning a mathematics competition at the local high school.
- Pupils play happily and are thoughtful and considerate to others. They love the many opportunities to take on responsibilities, such as being a school councillor or play leader, and planting and managing the school garden as part of the environmental club. They also enjoy the vast array of clubs and activities that help them to pursue their interests and develop individual and team leadership skills, such as in tennis, dance and drama and tag rugby.
- Pupils demonstrate great respect and appreciation for other cultures and faiths and the rights of people to hold different beliefs. As one pupil said, 'Everyone is equal; no-one is right or wrong.'
- Pupils eagerly develop their self-confidence and team-building skills through a wide range of trips and residential visits to Skegness and a great deal of charity work, such as helping children and families affected by war. 'We might be a small school but we do a lot.' said one pupil with pride.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of how to stay safe, especially from strangers and in keeping others safe. Older pupils have a particularly firm grasp of e-safety. A typical pupil comment was, 'Never share your personal information with anyone you don't know well.'
- Pupils have a very secure understanding of the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and bullying as a result of prejudice. They say that it is not a problem in school, but if it did happen, they have confidence in staff to sort it out quickly and fairly.
- Parents' responses to the school's own surveys, and comments made in discussions with inspectors show that parents are confident that their children feel safe, and staff keep them safe, when they are at school.
- The governing body ensures that all risk assessments are of a high quality, particularly those relating to school trips and residential visits. They also check rigorously on all adults who visit or work in the school to make sure that all pupils are safe and that the environment is as safe as possible.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Staff have superb relationships with pupils and use their excellent knowledge of them as individuals to encourage and nurture a love of learning and to motivate pupils to aim high. A typical pupil comment was, 'Teachers know us really well and help us to improve.'
- Teachers skilfully check on how well pupils are learning in order to ensure that activities stretch the abilities of all pupils, including the most able. The needs of individual pupils are identified quickly and fully supported by teachers and skilled teaching assistants, so that any problems, either physical or social, are identified properly and support provided to offset the problem. This is one reason why achievement is outstanding across the school in reading, writing and mathematics.
- All staff make excellent use of the praise and reward systems established throughout the school to help motivate pupils to try hard and do their best. This exceptional management of the behaviour and attitudes of pupils results in eager learners who want to achieve.
- The teaching of reading is skilled and systematic, with closely targeted support for those pupils who need it. This helps pupils to become highly successful readers. Staff promote a love of reading, so that pupils are keen readers with firm ideas about their favourite authors.
- Pupils have many opportunities to extend their writing skills across subjects in many different and exciting ways, such as when a spacecraft crashed on the school playground. Teachers ask challenging questions that help pupils to think through their ideas to produce lively and thoughtful writing. They challenge pupils to choose the most telling words, and in this way their vocabulary increases. When pupils work with partners, they share ideas enthusiastically and work together to improve their writing.

- Teachers regularly move pupils on swiftly to more demanding work without wasting any learning time. During this inspection, for example, the most-able pupils were challenged, right from the start, to use evidence from the class book, *George's Marvellous Medicine*, to support their writing about the behaviour and feelings of the characters in the story. Teachers provide highly creative and interesting tasks that motivate and inspire pupils. This was seen during a mathematics activity. All pupils were engrossed in practical activities in the school hall as they investigated how to calculate the measurements of parts of the body as a fractional percentage of the whole body. They then used this information to construct a life-sized drawing of Robert Wadlow, the tallest man in the world. The teacher used excellent subject knowledge to probe pupils' thinking.
- Some teachers provide high-quality marking and guidance on how pupils should improve their work and check that pupils have responded appropriately, but this is not consistent throughout school.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Standards by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in reading and mathematics are usually significantly above average. While for writing, standards are generally similar to those in reading and mathematics, in 2014 at the end of Year 6 they fell to below average. This is not a trend and was due to very specific cohort-related issues. Pupils in the current Year 6 are already working at levels above those expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The work of current pupils and records of the pupils' progress for the last two years clearly show that they make outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Indeed, inspection evidence shows that the achievement of pupils across all year groups is above the level expected for their age and in some cases, it is significantly above.
- A culture of high expectations, high-quality teaching and the focus on fully meeting the learning needs of every pupil results in all pupils, including the most able, being pushed to do their best. Inspection evidence from a wide sample of pupils' work shows that this is the case across the school.
- Pupils are provided with demanding work that stretches their abilities and challenges them to think hard. This is particularly striking in writing, where pupils have many exciting and inspiring opportunities to write and work with others to improve the quality of their work. As a result, the writing of the most-able pupils reflects the development of ideas and the use of high-quality language such as, 'Although the beaches are very lovely, most of St Ives is very downcast.'
- Pupils' work shows a firm grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar and standards in this area are rising. Teachers provide lots of opportunities for pupils to apply their skills across subjects to consolidate and extend them and pupils think deeply about the choice of descriptive language they use when writing. Pupils make excellent progress in developing their reading skills and a love of reading throughout school. This is due to highly skilled and systematic teaching and the provision of high-quality targeted additional support by teaching assistants. Results in the Year 1 national screening check in 2014 on phonics (letters and the sounds they make) were well-above average, clearly reflecting pupils' confidence and progress in understanding the sounds that letters make. As pupils move through school, their confidence and comprehension of what they are reading rapidly improve.
- Pupils demonstrate secure knowledge of numeracy and literacy skills and an increasing understanding of mathematical concepts as they move through school. This is because of the many opportunities they have to review and extend key skills and to apply them in practical, interesting and creative ways. Pupils particularly enjoy applying what they have learnt in order to solve problems. They show high levels of engagement with their work, such as when pupils in one of the younger classes were engrossed in tackling problems using grams and kilograms.
- Pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) resources confidently to support their work.
- Teachers and additional support staff ensure that the very few pupils from minority ethnic groups make outstanding progress. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make at least good progress from their starting points. Inspection evidence from case studies of individual pupils shows that they receive excellent support that often leads to outstanding progress.
- The work of disadvantaged pupils in school and records of their progress over time show they are achieving and attaining as well and sometimes better than others in school. In Year 6 in 2014, there were too few pupils supported by the additional funding to draw any significant conclusions.

The early years provision**is outstanding**

- Children usually start Reception with the knowledge and skills typical for their age. They settle in to school life quickly, because of the very strong links established with the independent nursery and playgroup on the same site. In addition, staff make excellent preparations and there are well-established routines that children and parents understand. This excellent start and the high-quality teaching children receive within a caring and nurturing learning environment, help all children, including the most able and those with special educational needs, to make outstanding progress. Children are particularly well prepared with the language and mathematical skills they need for Year 1.
- Staff demonstrate an excellent knowledge of how children learn and develop and grasp every opportunity to capture children's interests and extend their learning. Topics are carefully chosen and planned so that they appeal to both boys and girls. The learning environment is highly stimulating, as shown in the exciting topic on *'Frozen'*, where children were engrossed in excavating ice letters and arranging them into different words. This followed a visit to the Chill Factor and the building of an 'igloo' inside the classroom to stimulate children's imagination and inform writing about 'My frozen home'.
- The outdoor provision has recently been improved to include a fun and stimulating 'mud' kitchen made by one of the parents. Staff skilfully challenged the children to think hard about the menus they were writing and the different fruit to include in their mud pies and whether they needed cooking or not.
- Detailed observations of what children can achieve mean that the needs of individual children are addressed very well. Teachers overcome boys' initial reluctance to write successfully. As a result, boys write well.
- Children develop their early reading, writing and mathematical skills exceptionally well and show increasing confidence in recognising the sounds that letters make and counting accurately, such as in 10s to 100.
- The behaviour of children is outstanding. Children are happy, eager learners who play sensibly, cooperate exceptionally well and take turns. They listen attentively and share and handle equipment safely. They demonstrate an excellent awareness of their own personal safety and the safety of others.
- The leadership of the early years is strong. The new leader shares the headteacher's desire for continuous improvement and has an excellent understanding of strengths and areas for further development. The success of actions to strengthen the accuracy of assessments can be seen clearly. Staff make excellent use of regular skilful assessments and children's high-quality individual records of achievement (learning journeys) to ensure that all children make the best possible progress.
- The exceptionally strong relationships with parents were summed up by one parent who said, 'Nothing is too much trouble for all the staff in Reception.'

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	119480
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	453262

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	153
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Robinson
Headteacher	Douglas Scholes
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2008
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